



Managing a Differentiated Classroom: The Basics



Have a strong rationale for differentiating instruction based on student readiness, interest, and learning profile.



Begin differentiating at a
pace that is comfortable for you.

Time differentiated activities
to support student success.



Use an “anchor activity” to free you up to focus your attention on your students.

“Ragged time” is a reality in a differentiated classroom. It is not your goal to have everyone finish all tasks at the same time, so some students will inevitably complete work while others have more to do.



Begin by teaching your whole class to work independently and quietly on these tasks. Then move toward having half of the class work on the anchor activity (which can be adjusted to student readiness and interest), while the other half engages in a different content-based activity designed specifically for their needs.



This may help you feel less fragmented in the beginning, because a sizable portion of the class will be engaged in work that is largely self-directed, freeing you to guide students in the newer and “less predictable” task.



Ultimately, your aim is to have all students understand that when they complete a given assignment, they must automatically move to an anchor activity and work with that activity with care and concentration.



Create and deliver instructions carefully. Giving multiple directions to the class as a whole is confusing. A better alternative is creating and giving task cards or assignment sheets to individuals or groups. Another option is going over an assignment with a few responsible students today so that they can share directions with their groups tomorrow.



Assign students into groups or seating areas smoothly by color or group on an overhead transparency. Wall charts work well also.

Have a “home base” for students

Be sure students have a plan for getting help when you’re busy with another student or group.



Minimize noise.

Make a plan for students to turn
in work.

Teach students to rearrange
the furniture.



Minimize “stray” movement.

Kids need to move around, regardless of their age. It’s not necessarily a goal to keep everyone glued.

Promote on-task behavior.

Have a plan for “quick finishers.”



Make a plan for “calling a halt.”
In a differentiated classroom the time will come when you simply need to bring closure to a lesson sequence or unit. It’s important to think through how you will handle that.



Give your students as much responsibility for their learning as possible.

Engage your students in talking about classroom procedures and group processes.